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ABSTRACT

A checklist for critiquing participatory planning and evaluation projects is introduced. Under the legislative mandate of "Florida Blueprint 2000: A System of School Improvement and Accountability," Florida schools must reorganize before the year 2000 by involving and connecting stakeholders in improvement processes. Every public school must have a School Advisory Council comprised of teachers, students, parents, and members of the community. The participatory approaches used in three projects in Leon County (Florida) schools are described. The first section of the paper provides a rationale for the contents of the checklist derived from extant professional evaluation standards and participatory evaluation literature. The second section is devoted to applying the checklist to the three projects and evaluating them with respect to their foci, stakeholder identification and involvement, organization and negotiation processes, technical methods, reporting, and evaluation utilization and benefits. Lessons learned from recent participatory experiences include the importance of involving stakeholders in defining the project's goals and in conducting the project. In addition, participatory evaluators should establish the facilitative nature of their roles with stakeholders, but should be ready to assume various responsibilities as the need arises. An appendix presents the evaluation checklist. (Contains 18 references.) (SLD)

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PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO EVALUATION FOR SUPPORTING SCHOOL MANAGEMENT: THREE CASE STUDIES

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Abstract

The authors viewed participatory management and evaluation approaches as vehicles internal evaluators may use to effectively facilitate program evaluation within the new paradigm defined by the proliferating site-based management form of educational governance. They demonstrated that even though the new paradigm mandates the evaluation and decision-making roles to be within the purview of the school site, internal evaluators can assume effective roles which facilitate school decision-making bodies in approaching professional standards. They show that these roles can help decision-makers make quality evaluative judgements as well as empower stakeholders with meaninful input and opportunities to learn about disciplined inquiry. They reviewed their experiences by describing and critiquing three recent participatory evaluation projects in their district. The critiques were based on a checklist derived from extant professional standards and participatory evaluation literature.

Lessons learned from their recent participatory experiences included the following. Two things should occur early in the project. First, stakeholders should be engaged in defining or redefining the goals and in the conduct of the project. Second, participatory evaluators should establish the facilitative nature of their role with the stakeholders but should be prepared and willing to assume various reponsibilities as needs arise. When the evaluator is truly facilitative, stakeholders will help nurture trusting relationships which lead to quality evaluation and will assume responsibility for the project. By taking ownership, stakeholders seem to acquire a propensity to utilize the products, and decision-makers are encouraged to take consequential actions. Furthermore, when actions occur which are consequences of participatory evaluation, a propensity for follow-through evaluation among stakeholders seems to arise naturally.

Participatory Approaches to Evaluation for Supporting School Management: Three Case Studies

Debates over school reform, decentralization, and school governance have been ocurring in many states. Site-based management, one of today's most popular forms of decentralized governance, involves shifting decision-making from school boards, superintendents and central offices to individual schools and increasing stakeholder involvement. Site-based management is, in fact, a reform of the entire school system. Schools cannot change their modes of operation if the central office does not change. School districts and their evaluation units need to learn how to help schools become strong, competent organizations so that they can use their independence to improve students' education.

Through management and evaluation activities, stakeholders begin to empower themselves and become responsible for the decisions affecting the school. This new paradigm impacts the way school districts interact with school staff and community to conduct planning and evaluation projects. Rather than control and regulate schools, central office staffs need to learn how to collaborate and involve stakeholders as partners in program management and evaluation. Central to this process is the belief that the district staff's role in a decentralized school system is to create learning systems that enhance school improvement.

Florida has adopted this new paradigm. Under the legislative mandate of *Florida Blueprint 2000: A System of School Improvement and Accountability*, Florida schools must reorganize before the year 2000 by involving and connecting stakeholders in improvement processes. Every public school must have a School Advisory Council comprised of teachers, students, parents, and members of the community. The group is responsible for setting goals, developing and monitoring implementation plans, and conducting evaluations of school improvement. This milieu presents district evaluation units with a challenge to find roles which facilitate each school's efforts in effectively carrying out the legislative mandate within the limits of its potential resources. The authors' district evaluation unit is responding by experimenting with participatory management and evaluation approaches. The unit's ultimate goal is to implement approaches which fit the mandate and the expanding demand for evaluation as well as to help site decision-makers understand and incorporate professional standards in their newly acquired evaluation roles.

The purposes of this paper are to (a) introduce a checklist (see Appendix A) developed by the authors for critiquing participatory planning and evaluation projects and (b) to describe the participatory approaches used in the three Leon County Schools projects listed below. A rationale for the contents of the checklist is provided in the first section of this paper. The second section is devoted to applying the checklist to the three projects and evaluating them in respect to their foci, stakeholder identification/involvement, organization and negotiation processes, technical methods, reporting, and evaluation utilization/benefits. The paper is

concluded with some issues and lessons learned by the authors from their recent experiences with participatory approaches.

Leon County School District Projects

- A High Stakes Participatory Evaluation of an Innovative School Program. (1993-94) This evaluation was mandated by the site decision-making council after being initiated by the superintendent. (The future of the school's alternative education program was at stake.) The evaluation unit responded to the school's request for help by introducing a participatory approach focused on producing quality evaluation transactions in a polarized atmosphere. Increasing the evaluative capabilities of the school was a secondary concern.

- Conflict Mediation Tracking System: A Self-Evaluation Model for School Programs (1994) This grant project was managed by the evaluation unit using a participatory approach. A study group composed of school conflict mediation coordinators and expert consultants was formed to devise a data-driven management system which would have utility for school improvement planning and increase schools' evaluative capabilities. Facilitated by the unit, the group determined the objectives and disposition of work.

- Technological Initiatives Guide: Leon County Pilot Schools Share Their Experiences (1994 winner of the AERA Division H competition for innovative reporting) The evaluation unit conducted the project under the mandate of the district. The unit recruited pilot schools to participate in evaluating and sharing their technological practices and knowledge.

RATIONALE FOR DEVELOPING A PARTICIPATORY EVALUATION CHECKLIST

The checklist developed by the authors to guide planning, development, and critique of projects is provided in Appendix A. It contains appropriate evaluative questions for each of six areas corresponding to the following steps in an evaluation process.

- Focusing the evaluation
- Identifying Stakeholders
- Organization and Negotiation Process
- Methodology
- Reporting
- Utilization and Benefits

The following is a discussion of some of the rationale for conducting participatory approaches in evaluation. It is arranged according to the six evaluation steps above which define the areas of the authors' checklist.

Focusing the Evaluation: Definition of Participatory Evaluation

Garaway (1995) suggested that participatory activity in evaluation has a wide range of meanings. Making an analogy with action research, she maintained that the activity can be as simple as answering a survey or developing an instrument, or as extensive as complete involvement in the investigative process. She suggested that participatory evaluation has its foundation in the action research process. She contended that the participatory research process (PAR) has been widely used in the developing world, especially in non-formal education projects such as helping local farmers assess and solve problems. Whyte (1991) has defined PAR as a form of applied research, where the researcher becomes a facilitator in helping those being studied to also become actively engaged in the research process.

Cousins & Earl (1992, p.399) defined participatory evaluation as, "applied social research that involves a partnership between trained evaluation personnel and practice-based decision makers, organization members with program responsibility, or people with a vital interest in the program."

Easton (1993), defined participation as " a process by which individuals (or groups of people) assume a new level of responsibility for decision-making and action about goals, methods and resources in some realm of organized social activity of immediate concern to them, and through which they acquire or produce the new knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to play these enhanced roles."

Brunner & Guzman (1989) defined participatory evaluation as an education process that produces action-oriented knowledge. They described the role of the evaluator in this process as "a methodological consultant" who is responsible for organizing and implementing the evaluation.

Stakeholder Identification

Participatory evaluation has also been identified with the stakeholder approach developed in the late 1970s by the National Institute of Education. Bryk (1983, p.1) defined the stakeholder approach as "an attempt to reorder the evaluator's relationship with the groups involved in the program—that is, the people whose lives are affected by the program under evaluation and the people whose decisions will affect the future of the programs".

Stakeholder participation has been recognized as a critical factor for bringing about change in developing educational performance monitoring systems (Henry, Dickey, and Areson, 1991); systemic changes in a rural school district (Self,1994); and participation in evaluation designs of educational programs (Greene, 1987). Bradley and Earl (1992) and Garaway (1995) argued, however, that participatory evaluation models differ from the stakeholder-based model on several grounds including the number of stakeholders, the role of the stakeholders, and the function of the evaluator. Garaway (1995) suggested that the participatory model involves a relative small number of primary users. Greene (1987) suggested that criteria for choosing stakeholders should consider not only potential for making use of the findings, but also having some authority (administrators, program staff) to make dcisions. Greene also indicated that "legitimate program stakeholders are those considered to be directly involved with the project and both adversely and beneficially affected by the project."

Role of the Evaluator

Changes in the role of the evaluator has also been associated with the participatory approach. The traditional remoteness and lack of involvement of the evaluator has been criticized in the literature (Worthen and Sanders (1987). In the participatory approach, the evaluator assumes different roles. MacDonald (1977) sees the evaluator as "broker in exchanges of information between groups". Fetterman (1993), spoke of "evaluators as coaches or facilitators to help others conduct their evaluation". Garaway (1995, p. 87), suggested that the role of the evaluator" goes beyond being the principal investigator and participant observer to becoming a facilitator." She added that "as a facilitator, he/she becomes a learner, arbitrator, and teacher, developing local skills and promoting an interactive learning environment". Cousins & Earl (1992) maintained that the evaluator is responsible for technical support, training, and quality control and that these are essential components for the successful completion of the project.

Empowerment of Participants

The empowerment rationale has received considerable support in the literature as some evaluators advocate using the participatory approach to empower participants associated with a program. Empowerment is viewed in different ways. In the developing world, empowerment is seen as aimed at empowering the dominated groups so that they will be able to critically perceive their place within social systems (Freire, 1970; Brunner & Guzman, 1989). Another way to see empowerment is in terms of knowledge gained as a result of involvement in the program development process. The authors believe that as the participants gain more knowledge and skills, their decisions are better informed and, consequently, their organizations (schools) will become more effective. However, for empowerment to occur, certain requisites must be

in place. First, the participants need to be motivated to participate in the program. Second, they need to see the benefits of their participation, and, finally, their organizations (schools) need to be committed to the learning process as a route leading to improvement.

Methodology

Participatory evaluation usually raises questions of credibility and bias. The conduct of the evaluation should be guided by the appropriate professional standards set by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994). The accuracy standards, in particular, are intended to ensure that an evaluation will provide technically sound information. The role of the evaluator will be crucial to ensure that those standards are met. Choosing a particular method is basically the same as it is for other evaluation approaches.

Utilization

Perhaps the most powerful definition of participatory approaches comes from the literature on utilization. Since the seventies, participation of stakeholders in management and evaluation has been seen as improving the responsiveness of the process and the utilization of evaluation findings. Several models were proposed as an answer to traditional approaches (e.g., Stake, 1985; Parlett & Hamilton, 1977). The common premise among these models was that meaningful participation of individuals who have a vested interest in the program to be evaluated will enhance utilization. The authors contend that utilization should be considered broadly to include use of the results after the study is conducted. The engagement in the process during the conduct of the study also constitutes use, especially when stakeholders learn roles which benefit future evaluaton.

THE CHECKLIST APPLIED TO THREE CASE STUDIES OF PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES

The "Evaluation Checklist for Critiquing Participatory Planning & Evaluation Projects" (Appendix A) is used in this section to briefly examine participatory approaches used in three management and evaluation projects conducted by the Program Monitoring and Evaluation unit in the Leon County School District. Strengths and weaknesses of the projects are described for each of the six areas referred to in the checklist. The overall value of the particular participatory application is addressed according to those criteria.

Project #1
A High Stakes Participatory Evaluation of an Innovative School Program

Green and Morris (1994) provided the following brief description of the purpose, setting, and overall conduct of the high stakes participatory evaluation project treated here.

> "This project focused on the status and the ultimate decisions regarding modifying and continuing an innovative middle school education program...The project efforts and processes were used as indicators for evaluating the approach."

> "An evaluation of this primarily self-contained program was called for by the superintendent in September, 1993, in order to help resolve continuing disagreements between stakeholders with bipolar positions regarding both the conduct and outcomes of the program...[T]he school principal, on behalf of the site decision-making council, requested that the district evaluation unit oversee the evaluation. The evaluator assigned to the project met with the site council and facilitated planning a general course of action from alternative evaluation designs. Consequently, the site council accepted a general design, appointed a special evaluation task force composed of volunteer teachers and a member of the program faculty, and invited the evaluator to be part of the evaluation team."

Regarding the outcomes and importance of the project, Green and Morris (1994) wrote the following synopsis.

> "The results of the evaluation triangulated with and documented what was known historically...about the feelings and thoughts of the stakeholder groups. The overwhelming majority of the program students and parents wanted the program to continue with little modification. However, the faculty and general faculty/staff were overwhelmingly opposed to certain characteristics of the program...As a consequence, the new administration of the school, in conjunction with interested teachers and site council members and district office staff,

envisioned, developed, and initiated two new innovative educational programs for the school. The new programs incorpoorated characteristics the faculty survey results indicated were important...[T]he superintendent, and district personnel, and willing administrators of another school met with the parents and envisioned, developed, and initiated another innovative educational program in the second school."

On the surface, this evaluation project could easily be mistaken as a process which facilitated arrival at a political decision. Indeed, it was born of disparate feelings between major stakeholder groups and produced little information beyond documenting the positions and perceptions of the stakeholders. (Given the short timelines and particular intrinsic barriers, achievement and other outcome information proved to be of little value in judging the worth of the program.) However, the worth of the evaluation process *proved to be* in understanding and reporting the faculty's and administration's positions. Their positions were useful in conceptualizing and developing new programs which fitted the stated overall objectives of the school. The fact that the process was participatory (the relevant stakeholders enjoyed significant status and provided some input) contributed to program parents and students appealing the site council's final decisions and participating in building a new program for themselves and others of similar mind. It was the role of the facilitating evaluator to help the site decision-making council (which by Florida law was responsible for resolving the issue) understand professional evaluation standards and implement quality methodology. The following is a brief discussion of the project according to the six areas treated in the evaluation checklist. A letter grade and justification are provided for each checklist question.

Focusing the Evaluation and Identifying Stakeholders

By current Florida law, the process of managing and improving schools must be participatory in that representative councils composed of teachers, parents, students, and community must be actively represented in decision-making bodies. In this evaluation project, relevant stakeholders were represented by the site council, and the site council commissioned the evaluation and approved the evaluation design and conduct. However, the council went a step further by requiring that the evaluation include the evaluative judgements of the whole faculty, the program parents, and program students. (Due to limited time and resources as well as the belief that non-program parents and students would not have enough knowledge or interest to make valid judgements, potential program parents and students were represented by the faculty acting as surrogates.) The council created a task force of teachers and the evaluator to be responsible for carrying out the evaluation and reporting back to the council. (It is interesting that the task force included no parents or students.) The relevant checklist questions are addressed below.

C "Fair" — *1. The initial evaluation questions were determined by the stakeholding groups?*

C "Fair" — *2. The initial goals of the project were redefined as a result of stakeholders' input?*

A "Excellent"	*3. The final project goals focused on providing information or products for use by decision-makers in taking appropriate actions?*
B "Good"	*4. The relevant stakeholders were identified appropriately through negotiation with interested groups?*
C "Fair"	*5-7. The relevant (agents, beneficiaries, victims) were adequately represented in the working group?*

Participation of stakeholder groups in determining the initial evaluation questions and refining the questions was graded as "Fair" because while a legal representative body determined the goals and operationalized the questions, no attempt was made to engage relevant stakeholder groups. The initial evaluation goals were determined by the legal representative body, the site council. Its task force was directed to ask the relevant stakeholders to judge the worth of the project and identify their affective sentiments as well as determine, analyze, and report back relevant achievement and management factors of the program. A task force chairperson was selected by the site council, but membership was open—program faculty could and did join the task force. Parents were not solicited, and task force members lamented this oversight as the project progressed. The evaluator facilitated the task force in operationalizing the mission statement of the site council and in operationalizing the final questions. The operational questions for the various data collection instruments were fieldtested with similar stakeholder populations. However, relevant stakeholders did not directly participate in refining the evaluation questions.

The focus of the evaluation was "Excellent"—the endeavor to obtain evaluative information for the decision-makers was legitimate, and work proceeded in a purposeful manner throughout the project. The weight of the evaluation responsibility permeated the whole school and was especially felt by the site council, the task force, and the faculty. The evaluator felt that the perceived seriousness added significantly to the validity of the results.

Because most of the relevant stakeholder groups were appropriately identified during the negotiation with the site council, the authors felt that a grade of "Good" was justified for this question. Excellence was not achieved because potential program parents and students were not identified as a unique stakeholder group—the school faculty did represent them in a surrogate role. Primary reasons for not treating them as a unique set of stakeholders included the time and resources which would have been required to identify and solicit their input.

While some agents, beneficiaries, and victims participated meaningfully in the working groups, the participatory nature of the evaluation process may have been more meaningful had the groups included victimized program students and parents—the authors were not sure that the value of the process would have actualy increased significantly had they been included. Because these stakeholders were not included, a grade of "Fair" was assigned here.

Organization and Negotiation Process

The position of the evaluator was one of the most intriguing characteristics of this study. The evaluator established early in the process that his job was to facilitate the evaluation but he would not be responsible for either the quality of the transactions or the outcomes. As a facilitator, he adopted various temporary roles including facilitator of meetings, resource, teacher, coach, and worker to help the task force and the site council to maximize the quality and efficiency of its procedures and products. This allowed him to develop adequate working relationships between the various stakeholder groups. The bipolarity of the general attitudes and sensitivity about the program required him to be vigilant of his role and also restricted the information flow to various stakeholder groups. The evaluator and the task force never found a truly acceptable way to provide adequate information to program parents regarding goals, products, and decisions. In part, because of this, the parents appealed the consequential decisions of the site council.

A "Excellent"	*8. Trust was developed and established between stakeholders and the evaluator?*
A "Excellent"	*9. The evaluator was a facilitator and mediator for the working group?*
D "Poor"	*10. The represented stakeholders were made aware of the goals of the project?*
D "Poor"	*11. The represented stakeholders were made aware of products and decisions where appropriate?*

For the reasons provided below by Green and Morris (1994), the relationships and roles of the evaluator were graded as "Excellent" while communication with the stakeholders were rated as "Poor."

> "...a strength of this project was the trusting relationship which developed among the task force members and the evaluator. The evaluator and the task force clarified his role in the initial phases of the project--he would be a facilitator whose roles would be mostly determined by the barriers encounted by the project. He would advise and offer strong recommendations as the work progressed. He would not be responsible for the evaluation results, only for helping the task force complete the evaluation and report the results to the site council. Because the rules were observed, the various subgroups sought his advice and council repeatedly. Furthermore, true to the spirit of the initial contract, he was proactive in completing tasks independently and providing temporary leadership where necessary."
>
> A weakness of the project was that the two stakeholder groups most affected by the project (program students and parents) were not directly informed

of the goals and true nature of the evaluation until the parents program support group requested the task force chairperson to attend one of its meetings. (These two groups did receive some information through the program teacher who served as their agent on the task force.)"

Methodology and Reporting

The methodological activities which were planned and accomplished are described in detail by Green and Morris (1994) and are not discussed here. The conclusions reached by these authors were that while the methods and reports were plagued with problems one might associate with persons other than professional evaluators, and while stakeholder representation was limited in the reporting process, the resulting information was meaningful to the decision-makers. Great effort and enthusiasm was expended by the task force. Triangulated data obviated few significant threats to internal validity, and the data were used to conceptualize and implement new programs which agreed with the goals and objectives of the school. Apparently, one of the greatest disappointments was that a formal written report was not delivered to the site council because of limited time and resources—substantial and quality information was reported in pieces to the site council. This points out one of the most important characteristics of internal evaluation at the school level, all phases must fit within the limited resources of the school. Those phases which require the most time and effort of individual teachers and administrators must be streamlined to functional processes. In this project, a basic reporting method was chosen which efficiently utlized teachers' time, an oral presentation with data handouts. Program recommendations were delivered in a letter from the task force chairperson addressed to the site council.

C "Fair"	*12. The methods yielded information and products which met professional standards?*
B "Good"	*13. The methods yielded information and products which were appropriate for the goals?*
B "Good"	*14. The data collection instruments/products were developed through a collaborative process which meaningully involved stakeholders?*
C "Fair"	*15. The results and products were communicated or delivered effectively to decision-makers?*
F "No"	*16. The represented stakeholders were meaningfully engaged in reporting the results?*

Utilization & Benefits

Probably the most intriguing characteristic of this evaluation was that it was used to make a radical decision about the future of a particular class of projects in the school. Not only was an existing program terminated, but new programs were conceptualized and implemented based

on the results of the evaluation of the former program. Altogether the resulting information and participation [illegible]e process allowed almost all of the relevant stakeholder groups to become empowered and engaged in structuring future programs. It is significant that many of the task force teachers played significant roles in developing, implementing, and managing the new programs and have been engaged in follow-through evaluations of the new programs during the 1994-95 school year—thereby, maintaining and building a cadre of "program evaluators" with some experience. The authors' grades for the relevant checklist questions appear below—no grade was provided for the final question because follow-through evaluation for 1994-95 has not been completed.

A "Excellent"	*17. The evaluation information and products were used effectively by decision-makers to take appropriate actions?*
A "Excellent"	*18. The relevant stakeholder groups became more empowered as a result of the project?*
"Dont Know"	*19. Effective follow-through evaluation of consequential actions occurred?*

Project #2
Conflict Mediation Tracking System (CMTS): A Self-Evaluation Model for School Programs

This project was conceived to help schools with conflict mediation programs effectively manage and evaluate their programs by developing a system to collect and maintain their data. The need for this project resulted from the Florida Blueprint 2000 Accountability Law. This legislation mandated that schools prepare individual plans for improving safety and decreasing violent incidents on their campus. The Program Monitoring and Evaluation unit received a grant to develop a data system for conflict mediation programs in the schools which would help them respond to the mandate.

The CMTS was developed using a participatory approach to planning and development. One of the first actions of the project was to organize a group composed of school personnel experienced in conflict mediation programs, subject matter experts, a university consultant, and district technical support staff. The group devised the goals and objectives of the project, the work procedures, and developed the system. The evaluators managed the planning details, secured funds, collected literature, facilitated the formulation of the goals of the project, ensured the professional quality, drafted the instruments according the group's guidelines and helped the participants to reflect upon the nature of their projects. As a result of the collaboration, the CMTS was developed by July of 1994, and was implemented in voluntary schools during the Fall of 1994.

The presence of a university consultant who acted as a subject-matter expert and lended credibility was a unique feature. He was also useful in acting as a broker between district and school staffs; thereby, avoiding conflicts and increasing the effectiveness of the approach. (The change from a district-initiating to a school-initiating approach was a prominent issue among stakeholders at that time.)

It should be noted that this project was not an evaluation study, therefore, the "nuts and bolts" of problem formulation, evaluation questions, instrument selection, data collection, analysis, interpretations, recommendations and reporting were not dealt with by the participants.

The authors believed that the fact that the process was participatory contributed to school ownership of the products and increased utilization. The following is a brief discussion of the project according to the six component areas of the evaluation checklist.

Focusing the Evaluation and Identifying the Stakeholders

The stakeholders in this project included site decision-makers such as teachers, guidance counselors, evaluators, technicians, and the university consultant. The number of active participants was approximately twelve (school staff members constituted approximately half of the membership). The primary users (school staff) were selected by invitation. The main selectrion criteria were knowledge of and commitment to conflict mediation programs in their schools. Random selection of stakeholder is sometimes recommended in the literature, but, in

this case, the nomination process had some advantages. By including only a few committed site personnel, balancing and resolving various interests, opinions, and values were not a problem. On the other hand, the desire to keep the group small and manageable kept some beneficiaries (including students) out of the process.

Although the initial questions for this project were not defined by the stakeholders, they were involved in all phases of the project as soon as the grant was approved. They were instrumental in redefining the goals so that the goals were consistent with schools' firsthand knowledge about program features. This early involvement and ownership probably increased the utilization of the products in their own schools and affected acceptance by other schools which were not directly represented in the group. Such features are crucial to participatory approaches. Therefore, "Excellent" and "Good" ratings were given to these components.

C "Fair"	*1. The initial evaluation questions were determined by the stakeholding groups?*
A "Excellent"	*2. The initial goals of the project were redefined as a result of the stakeholders' input?*
A "Excellent"	*3. The final project goals focused on providing information or products for use by decision-makers in taking appropriate actions?*
B "Good"	*4. The relevant stakeholders were identified appropriately through negotiation with interested groups?*
B "Good"	*5. The relevant (agents, beneficiaries, victims) were adequately represented in the working group?*

Organization and Negotiation Process

A very high degree of trust was established in this project. This probably ocurred because the evaluators assumed responsibility for technical support, training, and quality control, but conducting the project was a joint responsibility. The group was engaged in the instrument design, formating, and dissemination of results. Also, the presence of the university consultant (whom the group was professionally familiar with) reinforced the credibility of the evaluators.

A "Excellent"	*8. Trust was developed and established between stakeholders and evaluator(s)?*
A "Excellent"	*9. The evaluator(s) were facilitators and mediators for the working group?*
A "Excellent"	*10. The represented stakeholders were made aware of the goals of the project?*

A "Excellent" — *11. The represented stakeholders were made aware of products and decisions were appropriate?*

Methodology

Issues related to validity and accuracy of the findings were not dealt with in this study. However, the instruments developed proved to be of high quality. This was evidenced by the utilization of the instruments during the second year of the grant when schools were asked to implement the Conflict Mediation Tracking System. Furthermore, in the process of developing the evaluation model and designing the instruments, the evaluator performed a pedagogical role in teaching the basic skills of systematic inquiry and instrument development.

NR "Not relevant" — *12. The methods yielded information and products which met professional standards?*

A "Excellent" — *13. The methods yelded information and products which were appropriate for the goals?*

A "Excellent" — *14. The data collection instruments/products were developed through a collaborative process which meaningfully involved stakeholder*

Reporting and Utilization

In a brief conversation with the participants, the authors had the opportunity to ask some of the participants how they felt about the project. They stated that the interaction and collaboration with the evaluators had a three fold impact: it allowed them to fully participate in the group work process; it enhanced their understanding regarding evaluation; and it gave them a set of material and forms to use in the evaluation of their projects. This is encouraging when one considers that school staff members who are likely to participate in evaluation activities do not have sufficient research experience and knowledge to carry out the tasks. The authors feel that the school staffs were "knowledge empowered" as a consequence of the project.

The participants had the opportunity to report the results of the project with other school staff. A workshop was organized during the summer and the participants themselves presented the materials.

While it is impossible to know the extent of the utilization of the findings and products, it is reasonable to conclude that the participatory approach (a) helped the stakeholders to articulate the data needs and outcomes of the programs (conceptual use) and (b) stimulated action (products developed). The final proof of success will be demonstrated in the report of the second year grant.

A "Excellent" — *15. The results and products were communicated or delivered effectively to decision makers?*

A "Excellent"	*16. The represented stakeholders were meaningfully engaged in reporting the results?*
B "Good"	*17. The evaluation information and products were used effectively by decision makers to take appropriate actions?*
B "Good"	*18. The relevant stakeholder groups became more empowered as a result of the project?*
A "Excellent"	*19. Effective follow-through evaluations of consequential actions occurred?*

Project #3
Technological Initiatives Guide: Leon County Pilot Schools Share Their Experiences

The document entitled *Technological Initiatives Guide: Leon County Pilot Schools Share Their Experiences*—winner of the 1994 AERA, Division H, innovative reporting award—was a post hoc summary of a participatory evaluation as well as a mechanism by which technologically-endowed schools could share their technology initiatives with other schools. In essence, eight schools shared large bond funds to acquire technology and implement classroom and management applications in 1989-90. They were required to share their experiences among themselves and with schools which did not receive the funds. In 1993, the district inquired as to what technological initiatives had been taken by these schools which were worth sharing with other schools. The program evaluation unit was asked to devise a post hoc instrument whereby schools would evaluate their own progress and report their most worthy initiatives in a manner that would allow them to pass their evaluations of their best applications to those in the district who might attempt to replicate or improve them. The resulting document contained a history and summary of the bond-funded program as well as single-page entries for each worthy "technological initiative" identified by the eight schools (see Green, 1993). The initiative pages were designed by a graphic design company so that users could quickly scan the salient attributes of the initiatives. In order to arrive at this information, schools were asked to evaluate their best intiatives in a survey. They described the characteristics of the the initiatives, appropriate environments for use, requisite expertise, hardware and software (requisites and desired), training prerequisites and strategies, special attributes and recommendations, and their overall evaluations of quality, helpfulness, friendliness, and robustness. Their responses to the survey were then entered in the single page layouts.

The authors are intrigued by the following paradox. While the guide received some professional acclaim, informal follow-ups in the district indicated that it was used very little by the intended primary audience (teachers and school administrators). The following critique by a principal investigator of the project offers some insight as to why this occurred.

Focusing the Evaluation and Identifying Stakeholders

The characteristics of the document were designed specifically for easy and meaningful use by school decision-makers. Special care was taken to offer them a highly readable and valid set of experiences which would help them in making tough, technological decisions. The technical qualities and intent of the main product were validated when it received some national acclaim. Therefore, the project goals and products were rated as "Excellent." However, informal investigations of the actual use of the document by decision-makers evidenced that little use has been made of the document. It is probably legitimate to attribute this to the absence of primary beneficiaries (teachers and school administrators) in the initial planning stages. ("Poor" ratings were assigned below to these attributes.) Involvement of the project schools was only negotiated when interviews were requested and surveys were distributed to collect the necessary information. The beneficiaries of the information (other schools to whom the documents were

to be distributed) were neither involved in the project nor officially informed of the project until the documents were distributed. They were never consulted as to their needs or desires for information—therefore, a grade of "F" was given for questions 5-7. Because formal follow-through evaluation did not occur, it was not confirmed that the document would or did fulfill the technological planning goal. (However, much effort was expended in logically deducing schools' needs and in planning and implementing a process which would require very little of schools' time and resources—time was considered a scarce school resource.)

D "Poor"	*1. The initial evaluation questions were determined by the stakeholding groups?*
D "Poor"	*2. The initial goals of the project were redefined as a result of stakeholders' input?*
A "Excellent"	*3. The final project goals focused on providing information or products for use by decision-makers in taking appropriate actions?*
C "Fair"	*4. The relevant stakeholders were identified appropriately through negotiation with interested groups?*
F "No"	*5-7. The relevant (agents, beneficiaries, victims) were adequately represented in the working group?*

Organization and Negotiation Process

It was important for the project to be non-threatening in order to encourage schools to make efforts to evaluate their own initiatives. Therefore, administrators were interviewed regarding the willingness and ability of their school to participate. It was important during this process that the evaluators develop a trusting relationship with the administrators and show them how the products might benefit other schools as well as demonstrate schools' effective use of the bond money. In the same vein, the evaluators felt that developing the project as a self-evaluation would be less intimidating and would gain more useful information than an external evaluation. Furthermore, schools would be able to take pride in evaluating and demonstrating their own effective accomplishments and would be given the opportunity to professionally advise others as well as have their names in a widely-distributed, professional document. In other words, the project was constructed to be professionally appealing and to make a decided contribution. With the district providing services in reviewing and improving schools' initiatives, the evaluation developed a collaborative feel. Review of the initiative pages demonstrates that the teachers and adminstrators took their roles seriously in providing good advice to other professionals. Contrasted with the early stages where relevant agents and beneficiaries were not consulted about the goals and evaluation questions, the providing stakeholders were treated as important team members.

As a result of the milieu described above, the organization and negotiation process was

graded above average with the highest grade given for the trusting relationship between the evaluators and the stakeholders. The most outstanding characteristics of this project were the quality of its ultimate product and the trusting relationships which were developed to assure its quality.

A "Excellent"	*8. Trust was developed and established between stakeholders and the evaluator?*
B "Good"	*9. The evaluator was a facilitator and mediator for the working group?*
B "Good"	*10. The represented stakeholders were made aware of the goals of the project?*
B "Good"	*11. The represented stakeholders were made aware of products and decisions where appropriate?*

Methodology, Reporting, Utilization and Benefits

In this section, the authors will not dwell on the qualities of the resulting *Technological Initiatives Guide*. It seems more important to focus on some of the project characteristics which fated the guide to primarily reside on the dusty top shelves of schools' book cases. The primary goals of the project were to document both the most advanced technological accomplishments/experiences of the bond money schools and to distribute their most useful evaluative information to their less fortunate peers. The first goal was accomplished, therefore, the project was not a failure. However, the second goal depended on how useful the evaluations were to the target population at the particular point in time. The technology demonstrated most often in the guide was late eighties and early nineties, and the beneficiaries were mostly interested in middle nineties technology because all Leon County schools had acquired at least some early nineties technology—as was evidenced in post hoc informal queries and through general enlightenment of the evaluators. No formal evidence exists to confirm the guide's actual use by either school or district level decision-makers regarding purchases, new applications, or planning for technology. Had the beneficiaries been included in the development of the goals and the implementation of the project, the potential utilitarian characteristics of the product might have been clarified early in the project. As the grades below reflect, although the methods yielded information and products which met professional standards, meaningfully engaged at least some stakeholders, and were effectively communicated and delivered; they were not entirely appropriate for the project goals. In light of informal, opportunistic inquiries by the evaluators, it is assumed that the *Technological Initiatives Guide*, although acclaimed as excellent, performed poorly in stimulating appropriate actions by administrators and in empowering potential beneficiaries.

A "Excellent"	*12. The methods yielded information and products which met professional standards?*

C "Fair"	*13. The methods yielded information and products which were appropriate for the goals?*
C "Fair"	*14. The data collection instruments/products were developed through a collaborative process which meaningully involved stakeholders?*
A "Excellent"	*15. The results and products were communicated or delivered effectively to decision-makers?*
B "Good"	*16. The represented stakeholders were meaningfully engaged in reporting the results?*
D "Poor"	*17. The evaluation information and products were used effectively by decision-makers to take appropriate actions?*
D "Poor"	*18. The relevant stakeholder groups became more empowered as a result of the project?*
D "Poor"	*19. Effective follow-through evaluation of consequential actions occurred?*

CONCLUSIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Under present mandates, many school district program evaluators—most assuredly in Florida—find that they are bound to a new milieu where meaningful participation and empowerment of host stakeholders is assumed. Indeed, having been held accountable, school decision-making bodies have been granted both the purview of decision-making and the purview of internal evaluation. District staffs exist to facilitate schools' management and accountability efforts. District program evaluation units, if not directed to be auditors for boards and superintendents, find themselves as participants in the milieu who have much professional expertise to offer, but no special authority other than professional and moral for assuming prominent roles. In the "site decision-making" paradigm, judgements of worth must proceed with or without professional, internal program evaluators participating. The authors believe that internal evaluators can participate in this paradigm and facilitate real stakeholder empowerment which includes the understanding, willingness, ability, and the actual achievement of professional evaluation standards. Furthermore, the paradigm offers the entusiastic evaluator almost unlimited opportunities for facilitating evaluation. Program evaluators are challenged to assume roles which promote achievement of evaluation standards as well as stakeholder empowerment.

The authors believe there is much for the internal evaluators who function in the new paradigm to learn and apply from the literature of participatory evaluation. The body of this paper contains many of the roles and activities that the authors have been experimenting with during the past several years as well as a checklist devised by the authors to enhance their abilities to critique the characteristics of program management and evaluation in the participatory milieu. Several lessons are listed below which have been learned in their first years of applying participatory approaches to school district phenomenon.

- It seems imperative that evaluators should establish the facilitative nature of their roles with stakeholders during their first project encounter with stakeholders. In both the conflict mediation and high stakes evaluation projects discussed in this paper, the evaluators established their role during the first encounter, and the stakeholder groups began to assume some ownership of the project, immediately. Both of these projects were characterized by stakeholder ownership of the products and utilization of the resulting products. It is also noteworthy that in both projects, the informal contracts between the evaluators and the stakeholders allowed enough lattitude for either to assume responsibility for new tasks as the necessity for them became apparent. The fact that neither project experienced conflicts between the evaluator and the stakeholders was evidence that trusting relationships developed early in the projects.

- Stakeholders should be included in the development of both the goals and the plans for conducting work because (a) they bring special knowledge and experiences to the project which may be invaluable in determining existing needs and (b) their interest in developing and utilizing products are increased if they have ownership throughout the project. The consequence of not including them can be a highly professional but minimally utilized product such as the Technological Initiatives Guide discussed in the main body of the paper.

- In participatory evaluation, evaluators facilitate in a complex environment which is fraught with politics and unexpected barriers and outcomes. Therefore, it is prudent to use triangulation in establishing information. In the high stakes evaluation project discussed in this paper, stakeholders were convinced of the worth of the final data by how well it seemed to correlate with other information. Stakeholders who are not familiar with disciplined inquiry may need the validity of the findings to be demonstrated to them in light of other evidence. Similar to the legal system, jurors (stakeholders) may make their judgements about transactions and outcomes according to the "weight of the evidence" rather than according to good inquiry methods which they may not be familiar with.

- The delivery mediums of reports may vary when stakeholders are engaged in the reporting process. It is unlikely that many stakeholders will have the experience, time, or desire to produce a written report of the quality expected of professional evaluators. The consequences of preparing a professional written report may be that the evaluator would write it and the stakeholders would not take ownership. The medium should be chosen to fit the abilities and qualities of the stakeholders and the environment. In the high stakes evaluation referenced here, the faculty stakeholders chose to prepare an oral report to the decision-makers supplemented by information handouts. (It should also be noted the faculty stakeholders later lamented that they did not prepare an inclusive written report. The task force chairperson felt "incomplete" until she put her own report and recommendations in a letter to the decision-makers.

- Stakeholder working groups may prefer to be small. It is significant to note that in both projects where a stakeholder working group was formed, the groups voted early in the process to limit the working group to less than approximately fifteen individuals for the same reasons. First, they felt it would be easier to work with just a few committed people. Second they felt they could fairly represent other professionals.

- Trust between stakeholder groups can be enhanced by a trusted figure who is responsible for mediating the opening contracts with the stakeholder groups. In the conflict mediation project, this role was performed by a university professor who was known by the working group members. In the high stakes evaluation project, this was performed by the evaluator whose first task was to help the stakeholders find ways to conduct the evaluation which had been mandated to help them resolve the conflict between them.

- In district internal evaluations governed the new paradigm, it is worthwhile for evaluators to spend time in a one-on-one pedagogical role. In education, there are many literate, well-meaning professionals who will take responsibility and ownership in participatory projects. Many of these people have pieces of the information needed to perform good evaluation. They just need help in rounding out their knowledge, and the facilitating evaluator cannot become familiar with their individual needs without working with them one-on-one. In the high stakes evaluation project, it was especially interesting that the working group included five classroom teachers with doctoral degrees—all of whom had some disciplined inquiry courses in the distant past. The evaluator felt that all of these

individuals, as well as others in the group, could become practicing evaluators given the desire and some on-the-job training. Under the site decision-making paradigm, individuals such as these must provide leadership, and internal evaluators should find ways to help them.

- Follow-through evaluation seems to be naturally enhanced by participatory approaches when stakeholders are engaged and committed. *Educational decision-makers naturally* feel more necessity to sponsor follow-through evaluation when their programs and products resulted from participatory management and evaluation approaches which were engaged in by their stakeholders.

- In conclusion, the most important lesson the authors have learned from their experiences is that participatory approaches facilitated by professional evaluators can lead to legitimate action by decision-makers. Furthermore, such action seems to be enhanced by the team spirit which is an inherent characteristic of successful participatory evaluation. The facilitating evaluator can become a part of the team, and evaluation becomes less negative.

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Evaluation Checklist for Critiquing Participatory Planning & Evaluation Projects

Grade {A=Excellent B=Good C=Fair D=Poor F=Did Not Occur DK=Don't Know NR=Not Relevant}

Project:_____

Focusing the Evaluation

1_____ The initial questions were determined by the stakeholding groups?
2_____ The initial goals of the project were redefined as a result of stakeholders' input?
3_____ The final project goals focused on providing information or products for use by decision-makers in taking appropriate actions?

Comments:_____
_____
_____

Identifying Stakeholders

4_____ The relevant stakeholders were identified appropriately through negotiation with interested groups?

The relevant _____ were adequately represented in the working group?

5_____agents {district & school staffs}
6_____beneficiaries
7_____victims

Comments:_____
_____
_____

Organization and Negotiation Process

8_____Trust was developed and established between stakeholders and evaluator(s)?
9_____The evaluator(s) were facilitators and mediators for the working group?
10____The represented stakeholders were made aware of the goals of the project?
11____The represented stakeholders were made aware of products and decisions where appropriate?

Comments:_____
_____
_____

Methodology

12____The methods yielded information and products which met professional standards?
13____The methods yielded information and products which were appropriate for the goals?
14____The data collection instruments/products were developed through a collaborative process which meaningfully involved stakeholders?

Comments:_____
_____
_____

Reporting

15____The results and products were communicated or delivered effectively to decision-makers?
16____The represented stakeholders were meaningfully engaged in reporting the results?

Comments:_____
_____
_____

Utilization & Benefits

17____The evaluation information and products were used effectively by decision-makers to take appropriate actions?
18____The relevant stakeholder groups became more empowered as a result of the project?
19____Effective follow-through evaluation of consequential actions occurred?

Comments:_____
_____
_____

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Leon County Schools
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